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A JOURNEY TO THE STAR LAKE COUNTRY AND OTHER NOTES FROM THE TAHOE REGION

By MILTON S. RAY

WITH THREE PHOTOS

THE spring of 1910 at Lake Tahoe was remarkable for being one of the earliest known to old settlers. At a time when usually grass in the meadows is just springing up and willows and aspens budding out, the meadow grass then (May 20) was already fast becoming dry, the willows and aspens were fully leaved, the roads were dusty and the weather sultry, giving one the impression of late June. Thus, when I encountered young-of-the-year Juncos on the day after my arrival (May 21) I was not greatly surprised; but I soon learned that the earliness of the season had not affected all species equally, and this, with the usual wide variation in Sierran nesting dates, made the effect of the early spring much less marked than it would have been otherwise.

My first day afield resulted in finding some very strange-looking eggs of the Redwing Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*, subsp?). Instead of the usual blackish scrawls about the larger ends these specimens are mottled, in some cases over the entire surface, with various shades of brown and pale purplish, which I hope to describe and illustrate more fully in some future paper. Among other finds were two nests of the Sierra Junco (*Junco hyemalis thurberi*), each with four fresh eggs. One of the nests was placed beneath a log in a

swampy meadow and was located by the bird dislodging one of the eggs in leaving, which rolled out on the meadow grass unbroken. A hard climb forty feet up an aspen showed a nest of the Cabanis Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus hyloscopus*) to contain four very small young. This is the earliest nesting woodpecker of the region.

May 22 a tramp was taken to Cave Rock and return by the lake beach. Killdeer (*Aegialitis vociferus*) and Spotted Sandpipers (*Actitis macularius*) were common most of the way, and a nest of the former was noted, a slight hollow in the sand lined with pebbles and bits of driftwood, with four eggs well along in incubation. A nest of the Blue-fronted Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri frontalis*) in a Jeffrey pine sixteen feet up, was found to hold three near fresh eggs, while not far distant in the cavity of an old stump 27 inches above the ground and lined with grasses, bark strips and feathers, was the large complement of eight eggs of the Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*). Six of these appeared well incubated and two addled.

The following day was devoted to work at the Rowlands Marsh, where the customary colonies of the Redwings (*Agelaius phoeniceus*, subsp?), Brewer Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus*) and Black Tern (*Hydrochelidon nigra surinamensis*) were found nesting. The only noteworthy finds were two nests of the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis canadensis*) described

in a previous CONDOR, and Fig. 59. STAR LAKE AT THE FOOT OF JOB'S SISTER, a nest of the Mountain Song Sparrow (*Melospiza*

melodia montana) at the foot of a small willow with five young. On May 24 a fully-fledged Western Robin (*Planesticus migratorius propinquus*) was noted, which is the earliest record I have for Lake Valley. Although many bird homes were located during the next two days it was not until the 27th that I made a noteworthy find. This, a nest of the Sierra Hermit Thrush (*Hylocichla guttata sequoiensis*), was found on the floor of the valley in a lodge-pole pine sapling and made of moss, grasses and stems and lined with fine grasses. It held four eggs, slightly incubated. Another nest of more than passing interest was one of the Mountain Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia montana*) placed in a lodge-pole pine eleven feet up, with

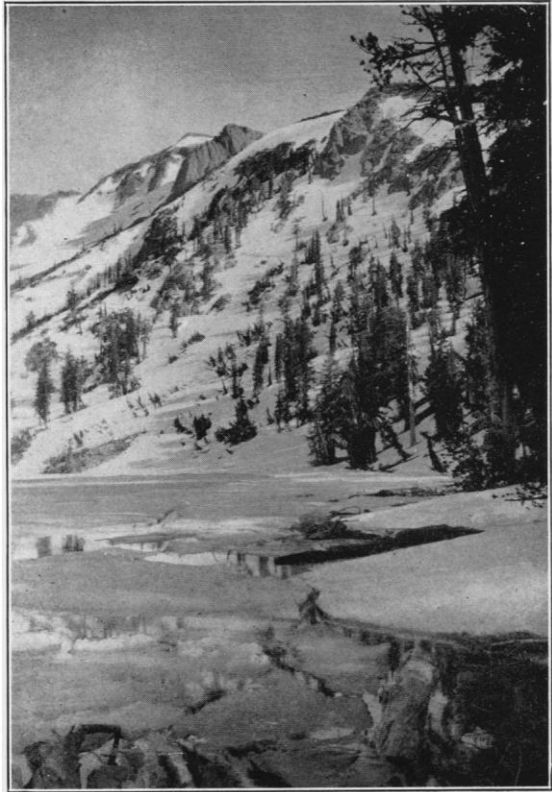


Fig. 59. STAR LAKE AT THE FOOT OF JOB'S SISTER, IN LATE JUNE; ELEVATION NEARLY 9000 FEET

Photo by Oluf J. Heinemann

three practically fresh eggs which were collected with the parent and which Joseph Grinnell pronounced typical *montana*.

On May 29 I took the first recorded eggs (a set of six) for Lake Valley of the Parkman Wren (*Troglodytes aedon parkmani*) with parent. The nest was first found on May 21 and was placed in a dead aspen 71 inches up. The cavity was extremely small and allowed very little opportunity for that extensive nest-building so dear to the heart of *parkmani*; in fact it had only a warm lining of feathers. In a hole in an adjoining aspen, twenty feet up, was a nest of the Red-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes cafer collaris*) with large young.

The Sierra Junco shows a decided preference for the margin of meadow lands and often selects situations where the nests become water-soaked and the



Fig. 60. NEST AND EGGS OF SIERRA HERMIT THRUSH IN LODGE-POLE PINE

eggs fail to incubate. One nest of this kind I found on May 30. Although the eggs were lying in water the parent remained incubating. This day proved one of continuous surprises and I felt well repaid for the long trip into new territory. The first thrills were two nests of the White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys leucophrys*). One was placed on the ground at the foot of a small willow, along a brook. The nest was flush with the surface and made of grasses lined with red cow-hair with which the green-brown eggs prettily contrasted. The eggs were three in number and almost fresh. The flushing of the sitting bird led to the discovery of the nest.

The second nest was along the same stream four feet up in a lodge-pole

pine sapling, well concealed in a thick bunch of foliage and composed almost entirely of lodge-pole pine needles and lined with fine grasses and horsehair. This nest held four fresh eggs. Not far away the home of a Sierra Hermit Thrush was noted four feet up in a lodge-pole sapling with a set of three eggs. The nest was of rootlets, grasses and stems and lined with fine, light-colored grasses. I was interested, too, in a nest of the Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana occidentalis*) which is far less abundant here than *currucoides*. This nest, in a dead tree trunk eight feet up, was warmly lined with woolly substances, bark strips, grasses and stems and held five eggs in which incubation had just begun. The main feature, however, of the day's work was a dainty nest of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula calendula*) with nine partly incubated eggs. The nest, although only nine feet up, in a small lodge-pole, was not particularly easy of access as it stood in several feet of water while a swift-running stream of icy water intervened. The pair regarded my intrusion with high disfavor, particularly the lady of the house, who scolded continually while I remained in the vicinity. Nearing Rowlands on the homeward journey a curious nesting site of the Brewer Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) was noted, the nest being placed on the edge of a grassy meadow beneath a board. It was less bulky than the tree-built structures and made of rootlets, grasses and stems, and lined with horse-hair.

On May 31 a nest of the Sora (*Porzana carolina*) was found at Rowlands with the large complement of 13 eggs. Many deserted nests of the Yellow-headed Blackbird with eggs were noted, the slender reeds not being sufficiently strong and bending over with the weight into the water. Many nests of the Black Tern were observed, none containing more than three eggs.

June 2 was a record day for finding nests of the Sierra Junco, two of three and two of four eggs being found. One was built in a slanting hole in the ground, arched over by pine needles, and would have defied detection had not the parent fluttered off at my approach; while another was well hidden beneath the broad leaves of a wild sunflower.

On the 3rd of June Mr. Henry W. Carriger arrived, but the only result of a strenuous half-day of joint field work was the taking of a nest of the California Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica aestiva brewsteri*) which I had located previously. This held four fresh eggs and was prettily woven to the branch of a lodge-pole pine sapling six feet up. On the following morning Mr. Carriger and I trudged some distance with a long ladder to a spot where I had observed a pair of Ruby-crowned Kinglets nest-building in one of those long, stringy, matted and twisted clumps of foliage peculiar to some lodge-pole pines. The nest was hung much like an oriole's, and after considerable manipulation we were rewarded by seeing seven eggs lying in the feathery bed of the dainty, broad-brimmed, mossy basket. Mr. Carriger found his first nest of the Wilson Phalarope (*Steganopus tricolor*) the following morning at Rowland's Marsh. The entry in his note book reads: "Four eggs; incubation one-third; nest, a small affair of marsh grass on ground in wet portion of marsh."

On June 5 Carriger and I started early on one of the most important excursions of the season, a visit to the Star Lake Country. This lake, nestling at the foot of a rugged and lofty peak called Job's Sister, has an altitude of nearly 9000 feet and the surrounding region is rich in birdlife of the Canadian and Hudsonian zones. Mr. Carriger and I confined our work principally to the broad Cold Creek Meadows which we reached about noon. En route the only

find of importance was a nest of the White-crowned Sparrow, with four eggs advanced in incubation. It was placed 28 inches up in a lodge-pole pine sapling, and made of weed stems and lined with fine grasses and horsehair.

The most important find on the meadow was a nest of the Cassin Purple Finch (*Carpodacus cassini*) with three eggs in a state of advanced incubation. The nest was placed on almost the top branch of a pine, about thirty feet up, on the edge of the meadow. It was of particular interest as nests of *cassini* are not often located or easy to reach, and the birds being also quick to desert and the nesting season a long one make it difficult to obtain a proper set of eggs. Although I have spent a number of summers at Lake Tahoe *cassini*, oologically, is still unrepresented in my cabinet, and when Carriger called from the tree-top that the nest held three well-incubated eggs I felt that another Tahoean oological mile post had been passed. Carriger also examined two nests of the Audubon

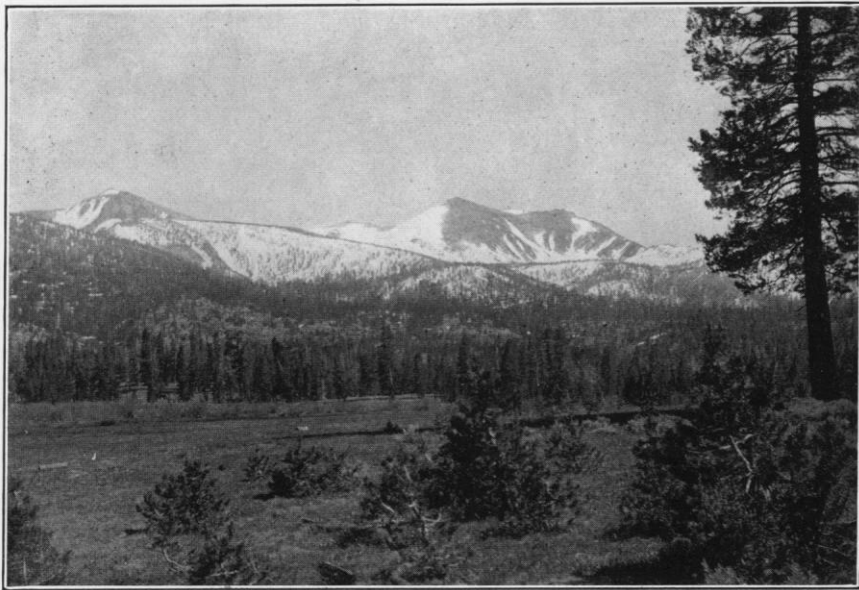


Fig. 61. COLD CREEK MEADOWS IN LATE JUNE; ELEVATION 7500 FEET;
FREEL'S PEAK AND JOB'S SISTER IN BACKGROUND

Warbler (*Dendroica auduboni auduboni*), each with four fresh eggs, and two of the Sierra Junco, each with five fresh.

In a lodge-pole pine twenty feet up, placed on the end of the bough, I found another nest of the Cassin Purple Finch with four fully-fledged young. Not to mention numerous nests of the Western Robin and Western Chipping Sparrow, the only other of note I found was one of the Audubon Warbler with four fresh eggs.

On June 6 I noted two very early nests for this elevation of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis*) placed in lodge-pole pines twelve and fifteen feet up, both with five fresh eggs. Later in the day I found four eggs, incubation advanced, of the White-crowned Sparrow, and four eggs, fresh, of the Sierra Hermit Thrush. A nest of the Western Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella socialis arizonae*) was collected with a set of four eggs—one of which was an infertile runt measuring only .55x.43; the others were normal averaging .71x.53.

A nest presumably of the Pintail Duck (*Dafila acuta*), which I had previously found, was also revisited as I desired to show it to Mr. Carriger. On reaching the nest, however, we found it deserted and the six eggs emptied of their contents, scattered about on the grass. Mr. Carriger located his first nest of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet today in a lodge-pole pine. Examination showed it to hold seven fresh eggs. Nearby one of the Yellow Warbler was noted placed in the dead portion of a willow without any attempt at concealment and yet for this very reason more liable perhaps to be overlooked, as nests of the Western Robin and Western Wood Pewee often are, which are built in dead or burnt trees.

Three nests of the White-crowned Sparrow, all on the ground in meadow land, were noted on June 7, one with four small young, one with one and one with four eggs, fresh. In a dead pine Carriger excavated a nest of the Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea pygmaea*) with small young, while a nest each of the Williamson (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) and Sierra Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius daggetti*) in dead portions of live lodge-pole pines were found in a like condition. We saw the first Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila*, sp.?) for the Lake Valley region today and were much disappointed in being unable to secure it.

As we intended leaving for the long tramp to Pyramid Peak the following morning we spent June 8 leisurely rowing along the lake shore east and south-east of Bijou. Many nests of the Tree Swallow (*Iridoprocne bicolor*) were noted in cavities in piles in deep water. Most nests contained either eggs or young varying from five to seven in number. The Tree Swallows were not the only species to take advantage of the protection afforded by water-bound nesting sites, for numerous nests of the Brewer Blackbird and one of the Mountain Bluebird were also noted. The most remarkable, however, were two of the Red-shafted Flicker, both with almost full-grown young, some of which in the excitement caused by our approach fluttered into the water. For a time Carriger and I were kept busy returning them to their protected and yet perilous dwelling place. The day's work closed early as we had to spend considerable time after reaching camp preparing for the long trip to Pyramid Peak, already recounted in a previous number of THE CONDOR.

THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE COLORADO CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS

By WELLS W. COOKE

THE appearance of "A History of the Birds of Colorado," by W. L. Slater, reviewed in this number of THE CONDOR, marks an opportune time for presenting the status of the Colorado state list of birds in the light of the new records furnished by Slater and accessions that have become known since the third supplement to the Birds of Colorado was published in the *Auk* for October, 1909.

The Slater list of 1912 shows both additions and subtractions as compared with the Cooke list of 1909, as shown in the following table.